



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



WORK STUDY OPPORTUNITY AT SIOUX FALLS VET CENTER

The Sioux Falls Vet Center (Veterans Counseling Center) is looking for individuals who would be eligible to work under the Work Study Program. Hours are flexible. No weekends. The individual works at the front desk under the supervision of the office manager.

There is plenty of time to work on your studies when you are not performing the assigned tasks. The Vet Center is a part of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs but is not the Medical Center. Vet Center clients and spouses are not eligible due to confidentiality. The staff is wonderful to work with and it's an honored to serve veterans.

If interested, check with your school veteran representative, your academic advisor, or call Brenda Teunissen, Vet Center Office Manager at 605-330-4552.

Who is eligible for the Work-study Program?

To receive VA Work-study benefits, the student must be receiving benefits under one of the following education programs:

- Title 38, USC, Chapter 30: The Montgomery GI Bill
- Title 38, USC, Chapter 31: Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation Program
- Title 38, USC, Chapter 35: Survivors and Dependence Educational Assistance Program
- Title 10, USC, Chapter 1606: The Montgomery GI Bill - Selected Reserve
- Title 10, USC, Chapter 1607: Reserve Educational Assistance Program
- Title 38, USC, Chapter 33: Post 9/11 GI Bill.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

VA Debt Relief Options	2
SDNG Award Recognitions.....	3-8
Upcoming Events.....	9

VA EXTENDS EXISTING MORATORIUMS ON EVICTIONS AND FORECLOSURES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will extend the existing moratorium on evictions and foreclosures, as well as extend VA loan forbearance requests, to June 30, because of COVID-19.

The current moratorium extensions for evictions and foreclosures were set to end March 31.

“We will do everything in our power to help veterans, their families, survivors, and our caregivers get through this pandemic,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “The Department’s moratorium and forbearance extensions support President Biden’s Jan. 22 [Executive Order](#) to deliver economic relief to Americans amid the COVID-19 crisis by addressing economic hardships the veteran community faces, through no fault of its own, during the ongoing pandemic.”

VA borrowers experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 can review [VA guidance for borrowers](#) or call 877-827-3702 for additional information.

VA OFFERS CONTINUED DEBT RELIEF OPTIONS TO VETERANS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reaffirms its commitment to extend debt relief for veterans through Sept. 30.

The VA will continue suspension of collection on all veteran benefit overpayments and medical copayment debts incurred after April 1, 2020.

The VA is suspending this debt collection to provide veterans continued financial relief due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“My top priority right now is to do everything in our power to help our veterans, caregivers, and their families get through this challenging COVID-19 pandemic,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “The VA will continue to find ways to provide real relief to two million veterans and their families as we fight through this health crisis together.”

To assist with making informed choices for their situation, the VA will notify veterans of the existence of their current debt and available [expansive relief options](#). These options include making payments, extending repayment plans, waivers, compromises, and temporary hardship suspensions.

Veterans and beneficiaries with questions regarding benefit overpayments can see [frequently asked questions](#), go online to [submit requests](#) or call 800-827-0648. Call volume is generally lower Tuesday-Friday.

For [health care co-payment debts](#), veterans should contact the Health Resource Center at 866-400-1238 for payments.

SD GRANTS AWARDS FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE DURING ANNUAL DINING OUT

The South Dakota National Guard presented several awards for distinguished service to a family, employer, public servant, and a state agency during its 2021 Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Pierre, Feb. 4.

The annual event brings together National Guard members from across the state for a formal evening to honor the organization's history and to recognize individual achievements from the past year.

The awards presented included recognition of outstanding volunteerism by a SDNG family, outstanding support from a South Dakota reserve component employer, lifetime service by a public servant in support of the SDNG mission, and recognition of a state agency for partnership with the SDNG.

The event keynote speakers Gov. Kristi Noem and Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general, presented the awards.

The South Dakota Department of Health and Gov. Kristi Noem were each presented with a South Dakota National Guard Minuteman statute in recognition of their outstanding leadership and service in support of the citizens of the state during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Department of Health (DOH) and Gov. Noem served with distinction to address the emergence of the novel coronavirus and prepare for the state's response to the pandemic. They worked with the federal government, CDC, and healthcare partners across the state to protect South Dakotans from COVID-19.

Through her leadership, Gov. Noem quickly authorized the use of the SDNG to begin supporting the DOH's mission in preparing and responding to the pandemic. Under the leadership of Secretary Kim Malsam-Rysdon, the DOH began planning, coordination, and execution of different missions and capabilities required to support the state's efforts in responding to public health and safety concerns.

The DOH partnered with state healthcare networks and the SDNG to respond to a number of immediate requirements and prepare for potential needs. This included establishing alternate care facilities, supporting the DOH's call center, establishing medical capabilities teams and medical evacuation and transportation teams, and support for COVID-19 drive-thru testing locations.

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AWARDS (CONTINUED)

“All state emergencies are unique and present both challenges and opportunities, and the COVID-19 support mission was no different,” said Maj. Gen. Marlette. “We were very fortunate to have formed such a great relationship with the DOH Secretary Kim Malsam-Rysdon. Her leadership truly made a difference and her team stepped up to meet every challenge head on.”

“As our commander-in-chief, Gov. Noem recognizes the value, role, and capabilities the South Dakota National Guard brings in supporting the state during emergencies and natural disasters,” added Marlette. “Under her leadership, she did not hesitate to use the National Guard to help in the state’s response to this pandemic.”



KBJM Radio was awarded the South Dakota Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award. The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one South Dakota employer who provides exceptional support to national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard or Reserve.

KBJM Radio located in Lemmon reaches listeners in northwestern South Dakota and southwestern North Dakota and provides services ranging from local to national and international news, weather forecasts and severe weather alerts, live broadcasts of high school games, and playing country and classic music hits.

Staff Sgt. Danielle Walraven, with the SDNG’s 842nd Engineer Company, works as the office manager and in sales at KBJM. Based on the support received from KBJM Radio, she nominated the station and her employer, Mike Schweitzer, for the Pro Patria Award.

Walraven is one of three employees in the rural business, and her absence while fulfilling her military obligations is surely felt. However, KBJM and Mike Schweitzer, go above and beyond their responsibilities to ensure she is successful in her military service.

“Mike does everything he can in our area to support not just me but all service members and veterans,” Walraven said. “He always works with me and never stands in the way of my career and obligations to the National Guard.”

The Adjutant General’s Family Award recipient is the Johnson Family. The award recognized family members who support their service members in a truly exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices.

Allyson and her husband Staff Sgt. David Johnson, and their three children, are the epitome of a resilient military family. Staff Sgt. Johnson is a full time member of the 109th Engineer Battalion in Rapid City.

With her husband working in Rapid City during the week, Allyson works fulltime as the office manager at Krug Products, and manages their three young girls, while living in Madison.

Allyson also dedicates her time to being the lead volunteer for the 211th Engineer Company in Madison. David, a former member of the 211th, transitioned out of the unit, however Allyson continues to lead the 211th’s Family Readiness Group and helps coordinate family events.

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AWARDS (CONTINUED)

As the lead family volunteer, Allyson understands the importance of family and soldier readiness, and strives to involve all soldiers, families, spouses, children, and significant others with unit events.

As the 211th training requirements have increased over the past few years, so have Allyson's efforts; resulting in the mitigation of the additional stress on both the soldiers and the families. She has worked to schedule speakers to talk to the unit and the families, and oversees the notification roster and Red Cross message management. She also is heavily involved in the planning and execution of the unit's military ball, focusing on ensuring it is a family event.

"The Johnson's are giving by nature, and do so with joy and goodness in their hearts," said Maj. Quentin Johnson, Service Member and Family Support program director. "It's never a question of if they will volunteer, it's a matter of what are they going to do next that gives the essential backbone to the 211th Engineer Company."

Living in Madison, the Johnson's also open their house to soldiers every drill weekend; providing the unit members an alternative place to sleep and eat. The opening of their home allows Allyson and David a great opportunity to bond with, and get to know, soldiers within the unit in an informal relaxed setting.

"Their willingness and care for everyone in the unit is unparalleled and is something other families strive to emulate!" Johnson said. "The Johnson family espouses the excellence that has come to be synonymous with the South Dakota Na-

tional Guard. They are dedicated to supporting service members and their families at all costs, and we are proud to honor their dedication to our organization."

The Williamson Militiaman Award recipient was retired Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch of Howard. The Williamson Militiaman Award, established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson, recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-soldier or airman as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard, and the defense of the country.

Reisch served the state and nation for over 40 years in military uniform. Originally enlisting into the South Dakota Army National Guard in 1978, he received his commission as an officer in 1980 and served in many key leadership positions throughout his career.

Some of Reisch's key leadership positions included commander of the 153rd Engineer Battalion, the first commander of the 109th Regional Support Group, deputy commander of Joint Force Headquarters, assistant adjutant general for the SDARNG, and the 21st adjutant general of the SDNG.

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AWARDS (CONTINUED)

During his tenure as adjutant general from April 2, 2011 – June 8, 2019, Reisch was responsible for the preparation of more than 4,200 soldiers and airmen to be manned, trained, equipped, and ready to respond for state and federal missions.

From 2011 through 2018, the SDNG had more than 1,850 soldiers and over 950 airmen deployed to 12 different countries in support of overseas contingency operations. He also led the organization during the state's response to the historic Missouri River Flood, Winter Storm Atlas, Wessington Springs and Delmont tornado recovery, Puerto Rico Hurricane Maria recovery, and dozens of wildland firefighting support missions in the Black Hills.

Reisch's commitment to serve didn't end with his retirement in 2019. He currently he serves as county veterans service officer for Miner County, and in February of 2020, he was appointed civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army.



The dining-out event also includes highlights of the SDNG's service and achievements over the past year. The SDNG had a historic year of service to the state and nation in 2020. There were 490 soldiers and airmen from five units who supported federal stateside missions or overseas contingency operations in 2020. This included successful deployments to three continents and more than a dozen counties across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

The organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is now the longest sustained, state-supported mission in the history of the SDNG, with nearly 400 soldiers and airmen providing over 35,000 man-days of support. Additionally, about 180 soldiers and airmen provided support to the state in response to several civil unrest events during the year.

The SDNG also provided assistance to state and local agencies for support missions including counterdrug operations, wildland fire suppression, and search and rescue, as well as federal missions support for NORAD's Airspace Control Alert mission in California and for U.S. Customs and Border Patrol aerial detection and monitoring along the U.S. southern border.

Finally, the SDNG received a string of national awards in 2020, distinguishing itself as one of the top National Guard organizations in the nation demonstrating operational performance and readiness. The Air Guard's 114th Fighter Wing received the Distinguished Flying Unit Plaque as one of the five most outstanding Air National Guard flying units in the nation, as well as the U.S. Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for exceptional meritorious service. The 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion received the Maj. Gen. Milton A. Reckord Trophy and the Gen. Walter T. Kerwin, Jr. Award as the most outstanding Army National Guard battalion in the nation. Company C, 1-189th Aviation Regiment received the General John J. Pershing Plaque and the 235th Military Police Company received the Certificate of Victory, both for excellence in weapons marksmanship. Spc. Cooper Mueller of the 200th Engineer Company received the U.S. Army Engineer Association's Van Autreve Award, for his outstanding skill and performance as a U.S. Army engineer; and Master Sgt. Mathieson Smith of the 114th Fighter Wing was awarded the NGAUS Valley Forge Cross for Heroism while serving in a peacetime status.

SD GUARD LEGACY UNIT RECEIVES VALOROUS UNIT AWARD FOR SERVICE IN IRAQ

A South Dakota Army National Guard legacy unit has received the U.S. Army's Valorous Unit Award nearly 17 years after the company's service in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The former Parkston and Platte-based Company C, 153rd Engineer Battalion, and its assigned soldiers were awarded the VUA for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States during the period of April 10, 2004–April 22, 2004.

The company is one of 15 units designated for the award during this timeframe that served under the 1st Infantry Division, 3rd Brigade, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, which encountered heavy fighting with enemy forces near Najaf, Iraq.

Company C – a combat engineer unit with 113 soldiers – supported force protection, security and base defense operations for 1st ID forces operating in the region. The VUA is the second highest U.S. Army unit decoration which may be bestowed upon a unit after the Presidential Unit Citation.

In the year following the deployment, there was no indication from the U.S. Army the company would receive the award. Company C was eventually divested and re-designated as a forward support company as a result of a U.S. Army force structure transformation in 2008.

When the unit was actually submitted and approved for the VUA is unknown. However in January 2020, the U.S. Army's Human Resources Command distributed a nationwide listing of unit awards dating back to 2003 to ensure all units knew what awards they were approved for. The National Guard Bureau had each state review the listing and validate their assigned units. This is when the SDARNG discovered that Company C had earned the VUA.

"We were pleasantly surprised to see Company C had received the VUA," said Lt. Col. Jason Thomson, commander of the 153rd Engineer Battalion, who also served as a platoon leader with Company C. "The SDNG had to complete a request to receive the VUA guidon streamer as well as submit a roster of all soldiers who served with the unit during that timeframe. Their official records were then updated with a copy of the order awarding them the VUA."

A company reunion was held in Parkston on Feb. 6 to present the award to several dozen soldiers who attended the event. The unit's 2004 company commander, Capt. Dan Bosma was on-hand to present the awards. Thomson, who serves as the commander of the 153rd Engineer Battalion, presided over the event.

"Most of the soldiers have since completed their military commitments or retired after all of these years, and this simply gives us an opportunity to come together to receive the award and reflect on our service together during an important time in each of our lives," said Thomson.

Company C, along with the entire 153rd Engineer Battalion, was mobilized for duty in Iraq in December 2003 and returned home in March 2005. During the time period of the award, Company C was attached to the 1st Infantry Division and located in an extremely austere environment to establish a forward operating base located northwest of the city of Najaf.

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SDNG RECEIVES AWARDS (CONTINUED)

Najaf was one location of the Iraq War spring fighting of 2004, which was a series of operational offensives and various major engagements between militia groups and U.S. and coalition forces.

Company C's mission was to develop and enhance force protection and base defenses at FOB Duke, as well as to construct

and operate a detention holding area to support detainee operations based on expected heavy fighting with enemy forces.

The unit was also responsible for constructing a controlled access point to enter the base, supporting internal security missions, executing quick reaction force missions, and providing sustainment support to 1st ID units operating within Najaf.

"There is a sense of pride that the soldiers of Company C have always had based on their service during that particular timeframe," said Thomson. "At the time, we had very limited information on the entirety of the operation as a whole, but we were very much aware of the significance of what was taking place."

"Receiving the unit award and being recognized as being part of the events as they unfolded is very humbling to the unit to say the least," added Thomson.

Thomson says the Valorous Unit Award comes with a separate streamer that will be rolled up within the heraldry of the 153rd Engineer Battalion and be maintained on the battalion colors.

Valorous Unit Award: The VUA may be awarded to units of the Armed Forces of the United States and cobelligerent nations for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States while

engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party for actions occurring on or after 3 August 1963.



UPCOMING EVENTS

June 24-27—American Legion State Convention—Huron

Aug 16-19—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre

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